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Helen's Journal

Part 2: Colombia

By Helen Lamm

Unpublished work © 1951 Helen Lamm

This diary was written by Johanna Helene Marcus Lamm, and describes the Lamm family's stay in Colombia 1939-1940 after they fled Nazi Germany, but before they were granted asylum in the United States.

The diary was handwritten in English; however English was not the author's native language. The author herself made various corrections and additions to the diary in later years, with some sections modified as late as 1951. We have inserted all the author's edits and marginalia into the text as she intended, and also made minor corrections of spelling and grammar where necessary.

Footnotes and images were added by the transcribers, Harriet Ursula Lamm Ezekiel (the author's daughter) and Alan Ezekiel (the author's grandson).

As this diary begins in February 1939, the family has managed to flee from Nazi persecution in Germany. Helen secured Willy's release from concentration camp with false travel documents, but the family was allowed to take only a few suitcases when they sailed. Their family business, their money, their furniture and other property have all been left behind. The author is 43 years old; her husband Willy is 52; her son Herbert is 11; and her daughter Ursula is 8.

– Harriet Ezekiel
– Alan Ezekiel
May 2006

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Part 2: Colombia

By Helen Lamm

Feb. 17, 1939

I sit on the sun deck of the *Santa Paula*[1] with Mrs. G. from Boston - she, her husband and friends on a pleasure trip - New York, Curacao, Venezuela, Colombia, Jamaica and back - we on our way from Germany via New York, or rather Ellis Island - to Colombia. We possess the few pieces of luggage which the Nazis left us, the spending money allowed us for the trip ($100.--), a few English pounds deposited in Puerto Colombia, the port we are going to reach in a few days, from Martha[2] in South Africa. This is the positive side of the picture. The negative looks like this: We are worn out after the last seven years of Nazi rule, Willy's concentration camp, the Gestapo searches in our home. Our Spanish consists of a few words. We have small children. The balance is not very favorable, though I am unable to rationalize clearly. I am dozing in the hot midday sun which, together with a breeze from the Caribbean Sea (was there ever a deeper blue!) feels like a hot, relaxing bath and creates a wonderful laziness. I don't worry.

S. S. SANTA PAULA, SISTERSHIP OF THE SANTA ROSA, SANTA ELENA AND SANTA LUCIA.

Out of a profound silence, Mrs. G's question reaches me: "May I ask you something very frank?" "Yes, of course," I reply. "Well," she continues, "the thing that puzzles me is, what do you expect from Colombia? And do you have any definite plans?" I tell her that I had to look Colombia up on the map some 2 months ago, that it was the only visa we could obtain, that I would have gone to the moon, if necessary and possible, and that the one and only thing that mattered was to get out of Germany. "I have the feeling things will turn out all right. I like the name Colombia - so many vowels, so melodic!" (Silly woman, she must have thought) "I like Spanish; I feel free, even better, I feel like starting a new and adventurous life, and I know somehow we have got to and will manage."

She looks at me a little doubtfully. She is my age, her 2 children are our children's age, she has about the same educational background, is a sensitive person and obviously puts herself in my position. "Well," she sighs, "how fine that you look at things this way. Would you do us, Mr. G. and me, the favor of having a last cocktail with us tonight, and will you promise, too, to write us from Colombia how you make out?" I readily promise both.

We, Will and I, have a last cocktail with the G's. It is a parting from a very unreal, glittery life. I am presented with a box of candy with the words on the wrapping "To open in your room." In it, I find an envelope inscribed "For the benefit of your children, from Mr. and Mrs. G. and their friends." It contained $180.00. My feelings are a strange mixture of alternating joy, relief, depression, and I try to express these confused emotions to Mrs. G. with my sincere thanks. I spend a sleepless night. I will never forget. - The day after next, shortly before sunrise, we arrive in Puerto Colombia.

Old Mrs. Walker, with whom I had so many talks, was up long before her usual time. She presents the children with a box of candy and me with a bottle of perfume "Vers la Joie" (Toward Joy). Thank you, Mrs. Walker. She does not speak French. I decide it must be a good omen. The small boat with the immigration officers arrives. The sun rises: Saludos[3], Colombia.

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[1] The *Santa Paula* was a Grace Line passenger ship, built in 1932. Once World War II began, the ship - like most Grace Line vessels - was converted for military use. Under the name *USS Santa Paula,* the ship carried tightly-packed troops (3000 men per trip!) to North Africa. The ship survived the war and was refitted for civilian use in 1947. It remained a Grace Line vessel until 1958, when it was sold to Typaldos Lines of Greece, renamed the *Acropolis,* and sailed the Mediterranean. The ship was scrapped in 1972.

[2] Willy Lamm's sister, Marta Lamm Natannsen

[3] *Saludos* means "greetings"

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[2] Willy Lamm's sister, Maria Lamm Narramsen

[3] Saludos means "greetings"

Unpublished work © 1951 Helen Lamm

February 19, 1940 [4]

Here we are, the four of us, at the Custom House of Puerto Colombia, with Mr. G. from Barranquilla whom the Refugee Service in New York had contacted in order to assist us in settling our custom affairs and managing the trip to Barranquilla.

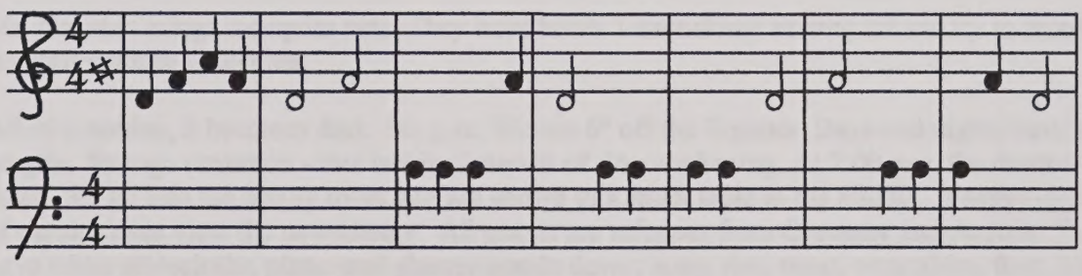
From the *Santa Paula* a small train had taken us in 15 minutes to the office. It is hot, but not as hot as I expected it to be. Mr. G. explains that we don't feel the heat because of the breeze from the Caribbean.

Mr. and Mrs. Uribe from Medellín, our very pleasant young table neighbors, are unfortunately in front of us, with so many pieces of luggage that we anticipate a long period of waiting.

Mrs. Uribe, a graceful, slender and very small Colombian of pure Spanish ancestry (very proud of it, too) with extremely light complexion contrasting strikingly with her black hair, sits on one of her many trunks in the custom house and argues violently with the officials. "Why shouldn't I buy 12 pairs of shoes for each of the two niños, and 24 pairs for my husband and me? Most of ours are worn; after all, we spent 6 months in New York. And as to the new dresses, a.s.f.,[5] I just forgot to take the labels off."

The Uribes fight for 3 hours. We are still standing in front of the Custom House. The children had a pink drink from a street stand (ambulant); it looked suspicious to me, but the thirst was too great. - At 12:00 noon, the Custom House closes without further announcement. Siesta until 2 p.m. "All right," says Mr. G., "we take lunch. I know a place which is comparatively cheap, good, and also comparatively clean." We walk a while through unpaved streets, dried-out grass, in the now pitiless midday sun. We come to a very modest bungalow where the poster says that meals are served. We enter a large hall with a table in the middle, a few stools. The table is covered with a stained white tablecloth, with plates upside down, knives, forks, spoons, glasses upside down. An old colored[6] man serves soup, fried fish, rice, beans, some unknown fruit called guanabana, and a small cup of very sweet, strong black coffee, especially good. After lunch, we want to wash and are shown to the bathroom which, with modern facilities such as water closet and basin seems to be the pride of the owner. It is extremely dirty.

We go back to the Custom House, which just opens up. We go inside. On a chest in the middle of the large room is a strange bird in a primitive cage. Herbert and Ursel are completely fascinated, for this black and yellow creature, big like an outgrown cardinal, starts the most amazing scale of tunes. It goes like this:



It is a Durbial, typical bird of the tropical part of this country.

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[4] She wrote "1940" but this is obviously a typo; she means "1939".
[5] And so forth
[6] The word "colored" in this place and time probably means a person of American Indian descent.

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We are very soon through with the formalities. Mr. G., after 5 minutes of the most violent arguing and bargaining, hires a negro cab driver with a beautiful Chevrolet. The car creeps slowly up the highway of ca.[7] 1 ½ hours to Barranquilla, through dried-out country, seemingly bare of vegetation. Occasionally there are a few emaciated cows. The sun burns. The driver turns the radio on - "Aida" from Bogotá. I close my eyes. I saw Aida in Düsseldorf, when I was visiting friends, all of us then in formal dresses. Did I dream then or do I dream now? The contrast is paralyzing. This feeling of dreaming is with me since I left Germany.

We approach Barranquilla through the suburb el Prado; at last something of tropical vegetation, palm trees, beautiful flowers, nice bungalows in Spanish style. Leaving the Prado, we are driven through unpaved streets. Frequent stones make us jump in the car. The dwellings we pass are of indescribable poverty, sometimes 4 wooden board walls without a roof. We are told that between the rain-times people simply lie on the ground within these 4 walls. We reach the inner town of Barranquilla and stop in front of the Pension "La Paz" (the peace).

The Pension La Paz

To be correct, the car stops in front of about 10 steps leading to a high sidewalk. We climb up and enter the Pension La Paz, a two-story corner building. We pass a square patio with garbage cans and piled-up garbage without cans, with swarms of mosquitoes. Greeted by the proprietor, husky, unshaved Mr. Heyman, in short-sleeved shirt, we are shown to the second floor and "the best room" which just happens to be vacant. It has direct connection to the bathroom and plenty of space for the four of us. The room is extremely large and, with chalked walls and an old wooden floor, utterly bare. The furniture consists of two metal beds with sheets on the springs and small pillows, 2 cots, tiny wooden table, 4 stools, open clothes rack. As to this, Mr. Heyman explains that the humidity is too great to leave clothing in the trunks or put them in wardrobes. The room has two windows, one going to a balcony too small to sit on, one to the wooden balustrade to which all the rooms go. This latter window has no pane; a small curtain covers the lower part of the opening. (How can we dress and undress with 28 people, mostly men, passing by this window to the one and only bathroom adjoining our room?). This bathroom has a cemented floor, shower and a broken basin, a toilet over which a sign reads: "Paper of any kind must be thrown into the basket." Mr. Heyman has some good advice: "Don't take more than two showers a day in the beginning, discard any silk garments, since the cucarachas[8] will eat them up, drink hot drinks, eat hot meals, also when leaving the pension later on." Well, this is all very well meant, but we won't stay in Barranquilla anyhow. "Well," he says, "many people said that before but then stayed. After a while you won't find it too bad if you part with a whole lot of things you cherished in your times of civilized life."

Mr. Heyman brings mosquito nets. They have holes. I unpack my sewing kit and try to mend them: my first work in Colombia.

All of a sudden, it becomes dark. Six p.m. We are 6° off the Equator. Days and nights have equal lengths. Strange sensation - this lacking interval of slow darkening. At 7:00 p.m. the dinner bell rings. We go into the dining room and are shown to a small table in the middle. Twenty-eight pairs of curious eyes view the newcomers. All guests are refugees from Germany and Austria. The tables have white tablecloths, plates and glasses upside down; soup, rice, meat, vegetables, fruit, black sweet coffee. We enjoy the meal thoroughly. The fruit is mango - tastes good despite a slight petroleum flavor, at least to me.

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[7] ca. is an abbreviation for *circa* (approximately)
[8] Cockroaches

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After dinner Mr. Heyman introduces us to different people - 2 physicians from Vienna, unable to practice in Colombia according to law; 2 painters; 1 painter-artist; 1 typist of the Gulf Oil Corporation; Mrs. Heyman, who is of sickly appearance; Miss R.; one other couple – the husband cook in the famous Tropical, the wife helping Mrs. Heyman - and their pretty, blonde 14-year-old daughter. All the rest are canvassers[9], buying cuts of material at Alberto Cohen's[10] dry goods store in the Calle Comercio and selling them from house to house. This, they say, is no easy job, considering the terrible heat, unpaved dusty streets, people without furniture, moving rapidly, and last but not least, houses without numbers.

"Who are these people?" I gather from what I am told that there are three definite types and classes: the fair complexioned pure Spanish of high education and intelligence (degrees from universities in Cartagena or the U.S.A.) owning sugar and cotton plantations, being stockholders of the oil corporations and gold dredging corporations; they are members of the Club de Barranquilla Country Club, live in the Prado and associate with the wealthy Americans, Germans and Italians. The Americans are in the oil and gold business mostly, the Germans in the hardware and drug line (Odol[11] and Bayer for instance), the Italians in real estate.

The second category is represented by Indians - the most numerous with reddish-brown skin; sometimes mixed with the third class, negros. The two latter categories have common traits, they are lazy, uneducated, most of the men illiterate, poor, men drinking as long as they possess a centavo (sugarcane rum - rum viejo and rum blanco). They are passionate lovers and bad husbands, but they love children, of whom they mostly have a good many. The women are pretty and slender, with tiny feet and hands, but, burdened with housework and the care of their large families, they age fast after 18. Children grow up without much clothing, no shoes. Little girls wear panties, little boys something around their chest. School is not compulsory.

There are unbelievably many thieves in this country and hardly any change noticeable despite all efforts of the very democratic and noble government. So whenever somebody has a bungalow to himself, he should never leave it unless somebody is at home without locking the front door tightly, close the window shutters carefully (there are no panes), but attend especially to the patio door, which has no filling but iron rods and offers the best opportunity for thieves.

"Well, it's better to familiarize yourselves with these facts than to leave you ignorant. You noticed the small openings in the walls, made for the air, of course, but thieves spray something in your bedroom while you sleep and, after you wake up, you find a thorough job done, sometimes, in fact, the pillow under your head is gone. It does not affect your health, though. You can render the spray ineffective, at least partly, by putting an open pan of water somewhere in your room, but the otherwise harmless Colombian thief might, if attacked, use pistol or machete. If all your windows and doors are locked, there still remains the roof with no ceiling under it, or the thin walls. If you have money, take it to the bank. Don't grieve about other things that might get lost. In this climate there is one thing good - you stop worrying. Living doesn't cost too much, incomes are low, cultural necessities - many dresses, a.s.o.[12] - a nuisance. You will be surprised how simple and primitive life can be."

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[9] At the time of this journal, the word *canvassing* meant door-to-door sales (peddling) in addition to the modern meaning of election/voting procedures.
[10] Alberto Cohen was an important leader in the German immigrant community of Barranquilla, a man with property and connections.
[11] Odol was a German drug company at this time. Although now a wholly owned division of GlaxoSmithKline, Odol brand toothpaste and mouthwash are still quite popular in Germany.
[12] And so on

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"Also in Bogotá, where we intend to go?"

"No, there it is different, there is the seat of the government, the Spanish and international influence much greater. But Bogotá is with _____[13] feet too high, the air is thin, the climate cool, humid and not healthy, Typhoid is frequent due to lack of water (drinking water sold in bottles) and it is even harder to make a living. On Monday, we suppose, you will see Alberto, chief counselor, who will advise you to go into the interior for the Gulf Oil Corporation[14] and to leave your family here for the time being. Say definitely and clearly "No," for the interior means even hotter temperatures than here, sure malaria, but, worse than that, constant danger of life by Indians who are headhunters, have poisoned arrows, and feel their soil invaded. There is no sleep in these barracks without a pistol in the belt. The Gulf pays very well, of course. - For your wife it will be hard to find a job. I hope you have some money to look around for 5 - 6 months and learn the language thoroughly."

"Well, this," I remark, "was very interesting. Enough for today and," I imagine, "also for the night."

Except for Ursel, there is no sleep, though we are dead tired. We are bitten by mosquitoes. Herbert cries. We, Will and I, try to digest what we heard. "Didn't you say something about an adventurous life? Here you have it and, I imagine, too much of it." The night passes slowly and painfully. At 5:30 , a siren sounds, which, I learn, comes from the newspaper "La Prensa"[15] and means: "Keep your 5 centavos ready, our barefoot boys will be at your door in a minute!" The bathroom gets busy. There is, I am informed, a strict schedule starting at 5:30 a.m., the tropical time for getting out or rather off the bed. We are kindly requested to wait until 7 a.m., being loafers for the time being. At 6 a.m., a bright Sun shines in our room. We take our showers at 7 a.m.. Pretty chilly, I think, dress and go into the dining room. Oh, the big coffee pot, the delicious aroma of the coffee, the good white rolls, and Mrs. Heyman's home-cooked jam (not included in the pension). There is a tiny piece of butter and little milk, scarce in this country, I am told.

Since it is Sunday, people sit around. We talk a little, meet a Dr. Neuman, doctor of sociology, actually[16] giving English lessons. We decide to have a look at the town and walk toward the center. On the beautiful square El Paso Colón, there is a statue of Simon Bolívar.[17] On one small side the large business building Edificio Bayer with the Gulf Oil Corporation; on the other small side a white little church - on the steps leading to it a legless man in dirty rags, a blind woman, crippled children, all begging. Car drivers yell "carro, carro".[18] The main business streets El Progreso and El Veinte de Julio are on the left broad side of the Paso Colón, the streets off the right side leading to the Mercado Municipal and the Calle Comercio.

In the evening, young men and girls promenade in the vast square.

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[13] The author left a blank space here, presumably intending to return later and fill in the elevation of Bogotá, 8350 feet.

[14] *Gulf Oil Corporation* was one of the world's largest oil companies at this time. Their fortunes later declined, however, and in 1984 they were acquired by Chevron. The Gulf name and logo is still used by a variety of different businesses and franchises, under a complex system of licensing agreements.

[15] *La Prensa* ("the press") was a daily newspaper in Barranquilla. It ceased publication in 1960.

[16] The author means "currently", not "actually". This is a natural error for a German-speaker to make, since the corresponding German word "aktuell" means "current".

[17] Simon Bolívar, 1783-1830, was a famous South American revolutionary leader credited with defeating the Spanish colonial forces. At the height of his power, he ruled Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Peru, and Bolivia (which was named in his honor).

[18] "Car, car!"

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We walk through the Veinte de Julio. Small modest stores have elaborate names "Isola Verte", "El Paradiso", etc. Our eyes are caught by the inscription "Salchicheria Alemana" (German sausage factory). Mr. Wolf, gentile, has besides a beer restaurant, immaculately clean. - There is no such thing as beer for us right now; every centavo counts. Mr. Wolf, 15 years away from Germany, speaks very good German. He and his blond housekeeper, German too, are barefoot and sit under a blooming tree. It is a beautiful tree with large pink blossoms. They, Mr. Wolf and the woman, are apparently not over-enthusiastic about refugees. We go home, eat a very good warm lunch with papaya as fruit, drop on our beds and sleep until late in the afternoon. The children play "Mühle"[19] with some young man, or rather Herbert does while Ursel looks on.

I decide to wash my piled-up dirty laundry in the cave-like room adjoining the kitchen where there is a large sink. It smells damp and moldy; the iron sink is covered with moss. This, I think, I will never forget the smell and half-darkness of the place and the queer thoughts running through my mind.

February 20, 1939

Mr. C. paid us a visit today after dinner and invited us to see him. He comes originally from Frankfurt a/M[20], has been living in this country for a year. He is one of the many canvassers. We promised for the day after tomorrow, since tomorrow we are going to see Alberto Cohen.

We saw Alberto today, all four of us, in his dry goods store (wholesale and retail) in the Calle Comercio. Alberto, good-looking, middle-aged, sat behind a counter, his secretary, refugee from Austria, at his side, in front of the counter a line of about 15 people. We heard all their requests, complaints, his advice, a.s.o.[21] Used to privacy in these matters, we were a little puzzled and embarrassed. At last, it was our turn. Alberto was very pleased - and said so - that I was able to talk to him in English, his favorite language. His advice is to stay in Baranquilla, for Willy to join the Gulf Oil Corporation in the interior and make big money, or, otherwise, to invest our money in cuts of his store and be "mercantes"; furthermore, which is of utmost importance, to learn Spanish. The Barranquilla Jewish merchants sponsor free evening classes including transportation to and from the suburb Prado. We thank him politely, promise to think things over, go home, have supper. After supper, the bus hired by the Jewish Merchants of Barranquilla stopped in front of the house. Dr. B. Schindler, Will and I stepped in, after I had recommended the 2 children to Mrs. Heyman's care. I am scared that Herbert, who used to walk in his sleep two or three times, might get out and fall over the balustrade.

Off it goes through dusty unpaved streets. The speed is terrific. The car goes over stones. We jump up in our seats involuntarily. "You get used to that," Dr. Schindler says. After half an hour, the bus stops in front of a white bungalow in the Prado. We are welcomed by Señora Murati, a Rumanian. The Spanish lesson is tiring to the limit. Shortly before 9:30 p.m., Alberto and several other white-clad gentlemen stride in. Señora Murati tries to show off with her pupils, with little result. We are driven home, after stopping at the Gasolina, where Mrs. Kainer gets out. A little interruption occurs when, with a sudden stop, the driver jumps off and returns with a giant turtle, which he ties to his seat - good soup tomorrow.

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[19] The traditional game *Nine Men's Morris* is called *Mühle* ("Mill") in German

[20] *Frankfurt a/M* is an abbreviation for the German *Frankfurt am Main* (Frankfurt on the Main river)

[21] And so on

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Today, or rather tonight after supper, we saw Mr. C. We went - the four of us - to his little bungalow next to some church. Mrs. C is a comely little woman; the two boys are our children's ages. There is only the most necessary and most primitive furniture, German chests transformed to shelves. An unusually heavy breeze swings the unshaded bulb hanging over the rough wooden table back and forth. We sit on stools and are offered bananas and sweet strong coffee. The beds have no mattresses either. "No use for mattresses - they warm you up too much, harbor animals, get rotten due to the humid heat. Wait till March comes. Then there is no breeze any more. The air stands still." They are experienced Colombians after a year. "You'll cry a whole lot, my dear," says Mrs. C., "life is not easy here. There is a daily struggle to keep your place clean, with gasoline.[22] - the scorpions, mosquitoes, frogs (the other day I had one in my bed, a giant one), the cockroaches, rats - well, you'll see for yourself." "No, we won't, we'll go to Bogotá." That also stops Mr. C's business propositions. Sure enough, he needs a loan and he thinks we can oblige.

I remember the song often heard in these few Colombian days: "O la brisa del mar."[23]

Slowly, but surely, we let ourselves be driven into the idea that Barranquilla is as good a place to start as any other town; it is not that we are so fond of this city, but the idea scares us that Bogotá might not be bearable for Willy at all.[24] We have the tickets for the airplane to Bogotá, but not enough to return. - The Pension is too expensive, so as soon as we have decided definitely, we'll look for a place to live.

Today, something awful happened. I had gone out of the room to shine our shoes, had taken off my rings and put them in the bedsprings under the mattress. Washed my hands and looked for my rings, but they were gone. A very fast and clever thief must have watched me through the open door take them off, hide them, and must have taken them while I washed my hands in the adjoining room. I was completely puzzled and so terribly upset by the loss that I could not even cry. I sat on a stool, felt completely empty in my head. Willy tried to console me: "After all we have lost, it shouldn't affect you that hard." We looked on the floor, but the colored woman, Beatrice, had just swept. We went to the dirty garbage cans in the square yard of the first floor, but, of course, no sense looking there. I felt doomed. -

Today, Mr. Paul Hess, a canvasser, went with us looking for a two-room apartment; in fact, he knew of one. We walked 20 minutes and came to the Calle Flores. It is a duplex bungalow, where Señora la Luz de Linero lives. It has the name Santa Anna. Señora la Luz de Linero lives in the Santa part. A knock at the door - there are no doorbells - a shuffling of feet, the door opens into a half-dark sala.[25] The woman who opens the door is skinny, has wrinkled skin, is rather tall and dark, has black hair put up in curlers, beautiful black eyes and a soft voice "Como están?", welcomes us and asks us to come in ("Adelante"). Straw furniture, herbs on the tiny table, woven pictures with biblical motifs on the walls. A white lace curtain swings in the door of the one room facing the sala. The tiled floor is clean. She shows us the two rooms for rent. They have no windows. One goes to the hall; the other one has a door to the cemented square patio.
Both have the usual openings high in the walls. We take them somewhat reluctantly. The kitchen, as well as the baño[26] with ceiling shower are outdoors, tiny and clean. We are going to move tomorrow. We have to pay 30 pesos in advance. Señora offers small cups of sweetened black coffee out of a

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[22] Gasoline was used as a cleaning agent and even sometimes for personal hygiene, to eliminate lice.
[23] "Oh, the breeze of the ocean"
[24] She is probably worried about the high elevation. Willy has had heart and lung problems in the past few years, including a serious infection that had him coughing up blood.
[25] Living room
[26] Bathroom

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thermos bottle, with the gesture of a queen. The children are delighted; in the patio are cages with birds, the largest one a durbial. Flowerpots are along one wall. We figure that we will take our meals in the patio, at least breakfast and dinner. There is no husband. He left Señora shortly after Beatrice's birth, el maluco.[27]

I keep house for the first time, get up at 5:30 with the sirens of the Prensa, take a long cool shower, fetch the milk pitcher and walk three blocks through the unpaved street to Señora Maria, who has her milk store open until 7 a.m. The milk is filled into the pitcher with a large ladle out of a tremendous container. A few mosquitoes have managed to die in it. The place is immaculate, as is Señora Maria, a beautiful woman with black hair down to her hips. The inscription outside the house shows that Señor Paolo opens his barbershop daily at 7 a.m., that is, after the milk business is closed (as is every milk store in Barranquilla). The walls are decorated with pictures of Jesus and Maria. I carry the milk home and go in the other direction to the corner tienda[28] of Magdalena and Filippo which, at this early hour of the day, is already right busy. On the corner bench, white-clad men drink their first round of rum viejo or blanco. Women, their beautiful feet naked, the hair black and oily, get their white bread (rolls), their manteca[29], mantequilla[30], and manteca negra[31] for the hair. Laughter and songs. A little embarrassedly, I ask in Spanish for bread and mantequilla, go home and start the charcoal fire in one of the three grates. What a job! Señora comes to the rescue with a large burning coal, and soon we enjoy the most delicious coffee "El Deseado[32]." Señora and her two daughters Soyla la Luz and Beatrice, all three in fancy Japanese embroidered robes are sitting on the step leading from the kitchen to the patio sipping black sweetened coffee out of tiny cups. Half an hour later, they start their breakfast of habena (oatmeal with milk and sugar, cooked the day before, very thin), white rolls, butter, fruit. The children are taken to school by the school bus sponsored by the Jewry of Barranquilla at 7 a.m. Will has a few addresses of architects. I go to the Mercado Municipal, 20 minutes away. This Mercado is something that, I imagine, will forever stay in my memory. Numerous doors open to arcades which are reached by a few steps; little stands with newspapers, lottery tickets, these typical Colombian sandals "para descansar los pies[33]"; white clad men; colorful women's cotton dresses. The fruit and vegetable market is separate from the meat market and the fish market, which latter borders the Rio Magdalena. Fishing boats carry freshly caught fish directly to it. I go through the fruit and vegetable market and am simply overwhelmed by the abundance: piles of fruits so far unknown to me: mango, papaya, sapote, mamae, few apples and these extremely expensive, as are oranges, but whole trees of bananas, large pineapples, watermelons (called botillas). Just as plentiful are the vegetables, the known kinds and the strange ones: eggplants, aguacates[34], a large cucumber-like vegetable. Sanitary police with rubber sticks walk through the aisle; the young men in charge are smartly clad in khaki and are said to be rather tough. The women and men selling vegetables have white caps covering their hair. Everybody yells at me, trying to sell. The exclamations are very complementary: "Linda, Lindissima, Bonita"[35], a.s.o. A little woman with a soft pretty face attracts my attention and I buy my provisions at her very well-stocked stand. I get the usual llapa[36] in form of an extra carrot and onion, and innumerable thanks: "gracias, gracias, lindissima", and proceed to the adjoining meat market. I decide on liver, which is extremely cheap.

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[27] *El Maluco* means "the evil one". The author is presumably quoting Señora la Luz de Linero here, since the phrase is in Spanish.
[28] Store
[29] Fat
[30] Butter
[31] Hair oil
[32] "The desired". This journal mentions coffee on nine separate occasions, and nearly all of those references are complementary. The author certainly loved her coffee!
[33] "to rest the feet"
[34] Avocado
[35] "Beautiful, very beautiful"
[36] A bonus, something extra

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They sell it unskinned, in one big piece. The man has no scales, just cuts the ordered 2# off, or what he thinks are 2#. In fact, he gave me 1 oz. more, as my curious checking at home proves. I have all I want and get out of the market. My bag is heavy and I ask a mule-cart-driver what his charge is. We bargain - I have learned the fundamentals - settle on 25 centavos, and off we go! At every corner he rings a little bell. He is extremely polite and handles his language wonderfully. He carries the bag in. I go to the kitchen. Señora's son has come for the 10 a.m. snack. He is living with the abuela[37], but takes most of the meals at home. He is a good-looking black-haired fellow, clad in white. A steak for him sizzles on the barilla[38], plenty of onions on it. Luigo talks with the durbial, which is simply out of its mind with joy and sings its unforgettable tune one time after the other. I unpack my groceries and the liver. All of a sudden, out of a blue sky, a crowd of turkey buzzards settles on the bathhouse roof, cawing continuously. I skin the liver and throw the skin up. An angry battle results, with the winner furiously pursued. I saw that before. In fact, they, the turkey buzzards, are after every dead animal in the streets and eat it up to the bones. They are called the "Sanitary Police #1" and it is forbidden to kill them. In the afternoon I discovered that a German family runs the little bakery shop and lunchroom next to us, Mr. and Mrs. M. and two daughters of 18 and 13 from Breslau. Their front room with little tables and a counter, looks almost clean, but the adjoining one with Mr. M's suits from Germany on lines, 2 dirty cots with rags, and her baking equipment, is unbelievably dirty. I am told by Señora that, at times, there are nightly sessions by the policia with the daughters as hostesses, with considerable drinking and noise.

Last night I woke up. A flashlight from outside, probably from someone standing on the high wall was searching our room. Willy woke up too. I had the money on me, as every night. (It was refused as too little by the bank.) Both of us think right away of young Señor Luigo, who, yesterday, offered us participation in some perfume manufacturing - 4 times your money back a.s.o. We pretended not to have any money. The walls are high and as much protection from burglary as can be. - Our hearts pound. After a while the flashlight disappears. Willy and I went to see an American architect who needs someone. I can hardly understand him.[39] But it is highway construction - so, nothing. We decide to force progress in Spanish and hire a recommended teacher. She is a Colombian, attired in black, with a white lace handkerchief which she always puts on the table in front of her. It seems to me that this first lesson was not so bad. Today Wolff was here, selling soap and tooth powder. He was so utterly exhausted that he sat for a while motionless on one of the chests in the patio. I fixed coffee and offered him bread and home cooked jam of carosso, a cherrylike fruit. He had two propositions for me: one to cook jam for sale, the other one to give English lessons. As to the second, he already has a pupil, Mr. Bier in the American Gentleman, employee of the Gulf Oil Corporation and very much handicapped by his lack of English. I protest: I haven't spoken English for 20 years. "Well, very well," he says, "there could not be a better opportunity for brushing up." I promise to see Mr. Bier.

Slowly, but surely, we start worrying since nothing happens, and our little money dwindles. In the evening, after supper, I go down town to see Mr. Bier. The streets are dimly lit, but the doors of the bungalows are open. In the salas, crowds of white-clad young men, colorfully dressed young women, children. Radios are turned on full blast. The American Gentleman is a two-floor building, a rooming house, with many families. The wooden staircase leads to the Bier's one-room apartment - large, with a table in the middle, two iron beds, 1 cot, a petroleum stove in a corner, also a sewing machine. A little breeze swings the shadeless bulb in the middle of the ceiling back and forth. It is comparatively cool. Mr. Bier is naked with the exception of trunks. We agree on 50 centavos an hour and start with the lesson right away. I brought a book with me. After all, it was not so bad and I got a kick out of it. Mrs. Bier, a blond gentile who suffers tremendously in this tropical climate and her

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[37] Grandmother
[38] Grill
[39] The author learned British English, and has trouble with American accents.

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[illegible]

young blond daughter with boyfriend from the Soadu[40] Air Lines sit with us at the table. They offer an excellent cup of coffee, we have a nice talk, and I go home. On my way through the Ricaurte, I ponder whether there are other possibilities in this line. I'll put an ad in the Prensa saying that I am looking for shorthand and typing in English.

The ad appeared and some answers, too, so I was this morning in an American-Colombian Company and had a trial. No success. I don't type with 10 fingers; my shorthand would suffice. There is an inquiry from the "Popa" in El Prado. The Popa is the Artillery Officers' Club, an unusually pretty one-floor building with reception hall, playrooms, a beautiful terrace and an unbelievably beautiful tropical garden. Unfortunately, there is no correspondence wanted, but English lessons. I insist that my English is school English, half forgotten, too, but they, three officers, one of them a negro doctor, want me to try, with so many Spanish exaggerations of their belief in my abilities, that I am dizzy, but promise to start next evening. I can't sleep, feel terrible. Willy thinks that there is nothing to lose.

This first evening, in which I learned more Spanish than they English, my very well-educated three Colombians were sitting with me on the terrace. A white-clad servant brought chiche de mais (a corn drink with whiskey). One stood behind the table with a large fan, another one used the Flit sprayer[41]. The scent of tuberoses or a similar flower was heavy in the air, and the whole situation appeared utterly unreal. Well, I got my 1.50 ps. and am supposed to come three times a week. I walk home through the endless Veinte de Julio, staying as much as possible in the middle of the street. The bus takes too long. The star-lit sky is different from Germany in the constellations. The moon is like a floating boat.

Through an Austrian architect, Mr. Zeissel, Willy got a half-pay job in the office of Manuel Carrera, Cuban emigrant. This is a break! Zeissel also wants to give him lessons in structural architecture. We decide to put Herbert in the Collegio Americano,[42] the only good boys' school, which we have to pay, though. As to Ursel, there would be the Collegio Alemán,[43] where the teacher and the class greet with "Heil Hitler", or the nuns' school. We'll let her stay in the Jewish school a little longer.

Today I met the first scorpion. A person should know about these dangerous insects ahead of time. I keep my plates on a tray (on a chest) in the patio. (it won't rain for another month). I took them off and saw a big thing like a spider. I called Beatrice in the kitchen and asked "What is this?" She yelled "alagrano," Señora came with a torch. The beast escaped behind the chest and the combined family crushed it to death. Well, a scorpion's or alagrano's bite can paralyze a person for days, is besides extremely painful. As to children, it might kill them. You can find them anywhere: in slippers, sleeves, walls, floors. Oh, heavens! By the way, they say young Señor has a playful way of killing scorpions, swinging a torch around them until the frightened beast commits suicide by piercing his own body with his poisonous sting.

I felt sick today - feverish and had abscesses on my legs. Went to Dr. Carlos Vélez of the Clínica Santa Clara on recommendation of Dr. Burstyn, got an appointment for later in the afternoon, was

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[40] This word is unclear in the original text. Appears similar to "Soadu". Possibly a proper name?

[41] *Flit* is the brand name for Permethrin, an insecticide used to kill mosquitoes. The product was heavily promoted in the 1930s with a popular, long-running advertising campaign ("Quick, Henry, the Flit!") using cartoons of whimsical, menacing mosquitoes which were drawn by Theodore Seuss Geisel – the man who would later become famous as the children's author, Dr. Seuss.

[42] "The American School" is a large bilingual (Spanish/English) private school, founded in 1889. It still exists in Barranquilla.

[43] "The German School" was a private school with primary instruction in German. It was closed during World War II. In 1956 the school reopened, and continues to this day; but German is taught only as a foreign language, and primary instruction is now in Spanish.

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examined with the verdict "furnuculosis[44] tropical". Dr. Vélez, in white apron and cap looks like a cook or butcher. He speaks English, studied in the U.S.A. In his waiting hall hangs a picture of Professor Ehrlich.[45] - mental connection: Paul Ehrlich strasse, Frankfurt am Main and - syphilis. Well, he tells me that this furnuculosis tropical will need weeks of injections three to four times a week. He is a cheerful, rather short man. As to my question how much the whole treatment will be, he answers "Can't tell you, but don't worry." That's where I heard the word "worry" for the first time. I venture: "Doctor, approximately?" "Let me work on you two weeks, and we'll see." "All right, tomorrow morning at 7 a.m."

I enter the cool waiting hall of the Clínica Santa Clara, tell a receptionist my name and receive a little plate with a number. A dozen people, mostly men, are waiting, most of them with one sleeve rolled up. White-clad, very well made up nurses with icebags and thermos bottles go up and down the huge staircase. The odor of disinfectant is heavy. It is cool. My number comes up. I am through in a minute and out in the hot street with a hurting and swelling arm. I cross the Paseo Colón, go to the market.

I got a translating job with Jose Spinner of the Casa Mablan, for twice a week, the days preceding the airplane's arrival from the U.S.A. and its leaving for the U.S.A. Paul Hess got me the job. Spinner dictates in German - he came many years ago from Austria - and I translate into English. -- Purest fun! He is suspicious and writes the firms' addresses in himself. It was two weeks ago today that I started with Dr. Vélez and I asked for the bill. "I'll send it to you." Told me that his great-grandmother was a Jewess from Spain. (He is very fair-complexioned.) Told me too that he was lucky enough to win a fortune in the lotería.[46]

This afternoon the "little rain time" started. It started with a thunderstorm and then the skies opened. We were in our bedroom with the door to the patio open. I was typing when, all of sudden, it came pouring through the roof. We got umbrellas. Half an hour later, it stopped as abruptly as it had started. We dried the inundation on our floors with the broom, sweeping the water to the patio. Señora was all upset and dressed to run to the Italian proprietor, give him a piece of her mind and ask him to see to it that the roof is fixed by tomorrow. Mañana! The sun seems doubly intensive after the rain. Mosquitoes, grillos[47] and that noisy bug that they call "loco" (its name is cigarillo) swarm.

Yesterday the abuela brought a tiny black rooster from the convent Biffi.[48] It seems too delicate to be kept alive, but she says it is a strong little specimen. The children are overjoyed. Herbert, especially, sees wonderful things in the little bird. He fastens his little leg before he goes to sleep in the bathroom, scared of a cat. We call him "Biffi".

Biffi grows miraculously and shows more intelligence than I ever attributed to chickens. He loves cucumber, starts climbing on my lap at dinnertime and today ended up on my shoulder pulling my hair.

Señora and I have some tensions. Maybe it's the small kitchen, though she promised when we rented that, except for breakfast she would not use it. After two weeks, she got fed up with the out-of-the-house-cooked meals that - at noon time - boys bring in pots lined up on sticks (2 boys carrying - one

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[44] *Furunculosis* is another word for recurring boils.
[45] The famous German Jewish medical researcher Paul Ehrlich, 1854-1915, won the Nobel Prize for his pioneering work in hematology, immunology, and medical chemistry. He did much of his work in Frankfurt am Main. Among other things, he discovered the first effective treatment for syphilis, which he distributed free of charge.
[46] The lottery
[47] Crickets
[48] This religious community and school still exists in Barranquilla, under the name "Colegio Biffi La Salle"

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on the left shoulder and one on the right shoulder). I mostly cooked outside in the patio on my oil cooker, but during the short rain period, I moved my things in. Willy and I contemplate renting a little house. They are building a new bungalow settlement a little farther out of the town; it should be ready by the middle of June. Hess knows other refugees interested in one of them, and it would be nice to live together. It would take away the feeling of being utterly forlorn in a strange environment.

Today is Sunday and we four walk up to the place Willy saw. It is a half-finished row of bungalows. All, except the corner, are alike, with sala, antesala, two bedrooms, 1 bathroom with shower between the two bedrooms, one bathroom (de servicio) outside.[49] The floors are partly cemented, partly tiled. There are no ceilings.[50] The back door frame is of iron and rods. -- The usual Colombian bungalow. It has a large back yard, only the walls of the patio seem very low. But the agent says that the city limited the height on account of the air circulation. Possible.

I am through with Dr. Vélez. He seemed to be sorry about it. We had nice and very mixed-up part-Spanish, part-English talks, and laughed a lot. He has had no time to compute the bill as yet. I insist, since things worry me. He makes a memorable and lovable little speech that he does not accept la señora's money, that he feels highly paid by the fact that he experimented with me and con la ayuda de Dios[51] got good results, that he asks my forgiveness, and that he would be ashamed to take money from me under these and other circumstances, and that he solicits the great favor of my future patronage. - I don't know what to say, so I thank del fondo de mi corazon[52] and from the bottom of my heart. This truly wonderful gesture impressed me deeply.

We rented the first new little bungalow in the Calle Hospital next to the corner house that the Rosenstiels from Dresden rented. It will be ready - so the agent says - by the end of June. The Rosenstiels[53] are an extremely ugly couple with a little girl who has a speech defect. They want to sell cuts of material for dresses in the hall. In addition, she intends to give meals to different bachelors. We, too, want to do something additional, though we both are still very undecided what it could be. I have the idea of planting peppermint tea in the back yard and promise myself something by the importation of "Brausepulver".[54]

We write to our friend Cardué in Düsseldorf and Wolff in Sprendlingen for Brausepulver ingredients from the former and peppermint seeds from the latter. After all, a person has to try.

June 30

The bungalow is not ready, will be "mañana".[55] Señora is glad to keep us another couple of weeks. She won't find other tenants who are so easy and, ridiculous as it sounds, so honest.

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[49] The "bathroom de servicio" is an outside washroom for servants or Indians, who were considered lower-class in this time period and culture.

[50] When the author says there are no ceilings, she is speaking of interior ceilings beneath the roof. These bungalows did have roofs, but from the inside you could look upwards and see the underside of the roof; there is no ceiling in between, and no attic space.

[51] "with God's help"

[52] "from the bottom of my heart"

[53] In the journal, the author wrote the more common name "Rosenthals" here, but it's obviously just a typo. She is still speaking of the Rosenstiel family.

[54] In this time period, effervescent/carbonated soft drinks were not purchased in cans or bottles (as today) but rather in powder form. This carbonated powder - often citrus flavored - would be mixed with water shortly before drinking. Today such powders are still available as children's candy (e.g. "fizzy powder" or "pop rocks"). *Brausepulver* is the German name for these powders.

[55] This cultural use of "mañana" ("tomorrow") actually means "some indefinite time in the future", and can easily be weeks or months.

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July 15

Today we moved into the bungalow in the "Calle Hospital". Señora, Soyla la Luz, and Beatrice were very nice and assured us of their lasting friendship. Our furniture: the two iron beds and two cots, bought together with the big square table and the four stools and the two racks for clothes before we went to live with señora, are loaded on a mule carro.[56] The place is not even cleaned by the construction workers and the floors and the bathroom give me many hours of work. The Rosenstiels will move in tomorrow. The locks seem to be all right. We, Willy and I, have the front room for our bedroom; the children the one in the back. We enjoy our privacy thoroughly.

Our neighbors to the right are the Gonzalez's, a nice couple with a lovely boy, about 6, with long black curls.[57] He can't get used to clothing, his mother says. So he plays with Ursel "en el cuero".[58] Mrs. Gonzalez is a lovely young woman with the softest dark eyes and long straight hair. She is the daughter of a doctor. Unfortunately - and she is very conscious of it - much darker complexioned than her husband.[59]

I never met the people who, of all things, have a mule (burro) in their patio, whose drawn-out _____[60] penetrates the nights.

We acquired a cat called Mitzi.[61] She is multi-colored.[62]

July 17

Last night I woke up as if emerging from the deepest well. It turned out to be Willy's excited voice. It took me some minutes to realize what had happened. Somebody had entered our room and taken out all our belongings, even my housecoat and slippers.

Willy had been awakened, thought it was me at the clothes rack, and found he had a man's white coat in his fingers. It was then that he yelled. The man had, according to Willy, then rushed out of the room. We hurried into the children's room where we found both of them sleeping, then went out into the back yard, where we saw a pile of our things and the tools with which the back door had been opened. The better clothes and other belongings were gone. It was when we looked at the tools that we heard Mrs. Rosenstiel screaming. They had been robbed too, and by far more thoroughly since they owned more than we did. All her silver was gone and all the merchandise they had bought for the store to be opened, and, worst of all, their money kept under her pillowcase. The very first night they slept in the new house! The desperate couple, in their nightshirts, represented a tragic-comic picture. We called the policia. They checked the footprints, shook their heads - recognized

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[56] Mule cart

[57] The adult Ursel still remembers this boy, whose name was "Joaquin", as a favorite playmate.

[58] Nude

[59] Lighter complexion implied Spanish descent, while darker complexion implied Indian descent. Mrs. Gonzalez feels embarrassed because Indian descent was a social drawback in this time and culture.

[60] Author left this blank in the original; presumably she intends this to be a burro's braying.

[61] The family's cats were always named "Mitzi", a common German pet name and pronounced in the German manner as "MIT-zee". In later years the family owned two cats, and they found themselves at such a loss for a second pet name that their second cat was simply called "kitty"!

[62] The previous three paragraphs (beginning with "Our neighbors to the right..." appear somewhat out of order in the original journal. The author was writing in a bound book using ink, and sometimes edited or added sections later by writing in the margins. In this particular case, she accidentally added these three paragraphs in the margins a page early, before the family actually moved into the new residence, so that they appear out of order. For clarity we have put these paragraphs where they belong chronologically, rather than where they appear in the margins.

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them apparently - and that was the last we heard. It was then that I lost my silk dresses and shoes. It did not affect me too much. The Rosenstiel's roomer, Mr. R., sleeping in his Adam's costume[63], had struggled with one of the intruders and appeared pretty much shaken up.

July 20, 1939

Mrs. Heyman left her husband, together with a young refugee waiter, and took her daughter along. Sunenauer[64] came this morning to ask me if I could help out. So I went to the Pension La Paz, followed the colored girls to the rooms watching their cleaning and honesty, looked into the kitchen and helped out at dinnertime. Heyman didn't talk about his wife, but asked me if I would like to go into partnership with him; we still had some of Martha's money. The place looked busy and I thought it worthwhile to discuss it with Willy. Heyman wanted an advance right away and was extremely touchy about interference; that decided it.

July 25, 1939

Mr. Heyman's daughter came back, disgusted.

July 28, 1939

Mrs. Heyman died by suicide this morning. We buried her in the afternoon, as is usual in this climate. A notice was posted in different public places - - - "La Señora Heyman ha muerto." [65]

The cemetery is at the other end of the Calle Hospital. The street starts with the hospital and ends with the cemetery - very symbolic. Heavy cement plates cover the coffins, so that the buzzards don't get to them. It was a very sad event. Mr. Heyman and the girl looked pathetic. It seems that the tropical climate does something to human relations, especially to the marital. In these few months, we saw a lot of disloyalties, broken marriages and one attempt at homicide in the refugee circles.

Today Dr. Neuman came and asked me if I would give him room and board. We could very well use the money, but it would mean the four of us sleeping in the back room, where the two beds and two cots would fill up the place completely. We decided to take Mr. Neuman[66] in room and board for 30 pesetas a month. He is a funny and introverted sort of fellow.

It has gotten terribly hot. Yesterday, Sunday, we were at the Kainer's, a little further away, in the direction towards the Prado. Mrs. Kainer is a nice old lady, good housekeeper, even under these trying economical and climatical circumstances. Her son is Herbert's age - good looking. The daughter, around 25, is married to an electrical engineer, who could not find anything in his line, and goes canvassing. The hall is large, comparatively cool. The place smells of kerosene. The beds have mosquito nets. In the adjoining bungalow, they have a fiesta and have been dancing the rumba since early morning; they still dance it now.

Mr. Heyman disappeared, probably went to Bogotá, leaving a lot of debts, but I had gotten the G.E. refrigerator before, as security for the 200 pesos I lent him.

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[63] "Adam's costume" is a direct translation of the German phrase "Adamskostüm", meaning "naked"
[64] Name unclear in original
[65] "Mrs. Heyman has died"
[66] Note that she sometimes switches his title from "doctor" to "mister". Neuman is not a medical doctor, but he is well-educated, and thus rates a courtesy title of "doctor" in this culture.

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I talked to Mrs. Kainer about the jam business, and she thought it was worth trying, fruits enough and cheap, too. But the trouble is the glass jars. Considering the high custom duty for glass, it is impossible to buy new ones, the only possibility is to buy the used ones originally from the U.S.A. (The American jams and preserves are extremely expensive and sold in only two stores, one of them belonging to a Viennese refugee.)

Today I bought jars and fruits and started with pineapple and papaya, which latter is a good filling ingredient, being big and extremely cheap. I found salycil[67] and bought a little rum. It didn't look bad and tasted good. But how can we sell? I packed a suitcase and went to the Prado with Willy. We knocked at doors which mostly were not opened, and, when they were, I could not sell. We walked dusty unpaved streets to a bus - it would have made a good picture - and knew that that was not the way for us. But neighbors and friends bought jam. Mr. Jacobson who rented a bungalow close to us, was especially enthusiastic about fruit juices, preferably carosso which, with a little shot of whiskey (and also without) was delicious. He said: "Why not open a little lunch room? The health certificate is easy to get, the license very cheap. You can serve sandwiches and beer and fruit juices." I know it is not what I want, but something has to be done. Willy's half-a-day job, my few lessons and hours for Mr. Spinner are not sufficient and, maybe, I'll get used to this strange thing.

We buy an electric mixer, a few small tables and stools, a showcase for pies and cookies, which I'll buy in a refugee bakery, and have a poster made: "Luncheria".

Today, Sunday, the luncheria opens. I sit rather nervously and uneasily in the antesala. The icebox is full of ice cream, chocolate and vanilla puddings, orangeades. The mixture for the milk shakes is prepared. After church there comes half a dozen little boys asking for their "introducing" yapa.[68] They like the pudding. Later on, one or the other curious man - no women - comes, and I serve a drink and, maybe, a sandwich, called *sandwiche*.

They make fun of my big German knives and forks which, nevertheless, I have to watch. I feel very much out of place. Somebody asked for beer. There are no liquor licenses, so we serve it, also rum viejo and blanco, but with that people - that is, men - stay in the evenings, drink one rum or beer after another, sing and talk. It also happens that there is no money afterwards and you get a slip of paper called a vale,[69] good enough to be torn up right away.

Sundays, at 10 a.m., Don Pliño del Valle, old dentist, comes in with companions. Pliño is a haggard, tall fellow of about 80. His face looks like a bird's, but his spirit is lively and his opinions of himself unlimited. There is only listening, and he considers interruptions as insults. "Since the times of Jesus Christ, there was never a human being as perfect as I am." (which sounds beautiful in Spanish) Once he came by himself and confessed that he had entered a spiritual transcendental marriage with me to last over the boundaries of earthly flesh for ever and ever. I was quite embarrassed.

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[67] When making jelly or jam, salicylic acid can be sprinkled in a layer at the top of the sealed jar as a preservative. The powder kills microorganisms which would otherwise spoil the food. This technique is out of favor today, having been replaced by modern high-temperature techniques designed to ensure that no living microorganisms get sealed inside the jar.

[68] *Yapa* is an alternate spelling of "llapa", meaning an extra gift or bonus

[69] A debt note, or I.O.U.

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called to vote. Some about the amendment and one about a measure to [illegible] and keep [illegible]. The secretary [illegible] the roll. Each senator [illegible] "yea" or "nay" [illegible]. Considering the importance [illegible] to place [illegible] impossible to buy non-dues [illegible] only possession [illegible] the second one made [illegible] [illegible] A [illegible] the amendment passed [illegible] economic expansion and would [illegible] [illegible] one or more [illegible] belonging to a common religion.

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

Don Pliño's son, dentista also, living across from us, lost one of his numerous children - meningitis. The consolation was: "Vamos conseguir otro". (We'll have another one.) I am worried about Herbert and Ursel.[70]

Dr. Neuman dislikes the luncheria.[71] He wants to eat his dinner alone - by the way, with a paper napkin, hard to get and entirely out of place.

Sept. 1, 1939

The war broke out. No possibility now to receive our things from Germany,[72] to which we were looking forward so much.

Sunday Sept. 1939

Willy got up first to cook coffee in the outdoor kitchen and came back: "There is nothing in the kitchen anymore - no pots, pans or china." (The electric coffee pot, fortunately, was in the house.) The strange thing is: the Yale lock[73] is intact. The mercado is open on Sundays until noon, so we will buy the most necessary china and pots. Afterwards, for the time being, we'll borrow cups and plates from the Rosenstiels.

Somehow, it did something to my creative powers. In the afternoon, in a quiet moment, I sat down and wrote a poem leaning heavily on "Uhland".[74] It started "Midnight drew closer already…" Then Dr. Neuman got inspired (after his shock had died down somewhat) and made a poem also starting with the midnight. It had in it all the frequent guests of the lunch room (refresqueria) such as McKinley, who had a beautiful singing voice, Pedro Garcia, who was the only Colombian with eyeglasses I ever met, and always wore a straw hat. It also had in it Pedro's marriage proposal to me - "after you divorce your husband", quite flattering in view of the fact that he was 20 years younger than I. It had Don Pliño del Valle in it and a very noisy Italian individual. So it was a good description.

Then and there we decided something drastic had to be done. We, that is Herbert, painted a large piece of cardboard black, and put a white skull and cross bones on it. We put this on top of the three stools, which stood on top of the table, in front of the back door, which was held together by ship's chains.[75] It will be a rather tiring every-evening procedure.

October 5, 1939

So far, no ladrones[76] anymore - toi, toi, toi.[77] But today the following happened:

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[70] She would have been even more worried had she known what her children were doing! Ursel and Herbert heard that there was "meningitis" in the house, but had no idea what the word meant, and therefore – with the curiosity typical of small children – snuck over to peek in the windows of Pliño's house! The author never found out.

[71] Dr. Neuman disliked the luncheria not only because of the crowding at the house, but also because the customers were using the house bathroom. Although there was a second bathroom outdoors, it wouldn't have been socially acceptable to ask paying customers to use an outdoor bathroom intended for lower-class people (servants and Indians).

[72] Jews who fled Germany during the Nazi persecution were allowed to take only a few suitcases with them. Most of their personal possessions had to be left behind, along with nearly all their property and money.

[73] The Yale Lock company started producing padlocks in the mid 1800's, and continues to the present day.

[74] German poet Ludwig Uhland, 1787-1862.

[75] Remember that the rear door is wrought iron rods, not solid, so the skull-and-crossbones sign is visible from the outside. The stacked furniture will make it difficult for anyone to force the door open quietly.

[76] Thieves

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The Hirschhorns, Dr. Neuman, and we sat in the antesala, drinking orangeade, when, through the open front door, out of the pitch dark street, a little man in immaculate white approached. He introduced himself as Thomasio Sillo, master thief and burglar, just released from the penitentiary. He said: "Ladies and gentlemen, I ask you for a contribution to my living, and do this in a very friendly manner, though" - pointing to his pocket – "I have everything to enforce it. Please."- I thought of the sleeping children, of the whistle which would make the quiet street alive with compañeros - got my pocketbook and gave him a small amount. So did the others. He bent down gracefully and left with "Vive Alemañia",[78] which broke the tension and made me laugh to tears.

It is dreadfully hot now; the nights don't cool off any more.

Oct. 10-Oct. 20, 1939

Mrs. Rosenstiel and I decide on a part-time Colombian girl. She wants her from 8 to 9 and I take her from 9 to 10. Where she got Maxima, I don't know. Maxima is a rather tall Indian with one eye - the other one was lost due to wrong medication applied by an eye doctor. She unfastens her heavy black hair as soon as she starts working, that is scrubbing the tile floors with soap, water and soaking them in kerosene. For the latter she uses her beautiful bare feet on a rag. She has the heavy braid over her left shoulder. She hums a little and is not very talkative. Once a week I have her do the laundry and, at times, she goes to the mercado for me. Maxima - as the majority of the Indians - can neither read nor write, but she has a tremendous memory. She won't forget one item of a long list. Her working time over, I hand Maxima a cigarro, the large dark Colombian kind. When she washes, she prefers to have it then. The laundry is beaten with a stick and hung up. It dries in fifteen minutes. Maxima has five children, of five pretended husbands. The last one was killed in the war between Colombia and Ecuador. At times, she brings a little girl who, today, let me know: "Mañana mi madre va casarse." [79] In fact, it was Maxima's last working day for the time being. I'll miss the woman, in her one and only spotless black dress. I'll miss this specific graceful position of hers, sitting in the backyard with drawn-up knees. (And I know, she doesn't wear underwear.)

My steady lunch guest is Dr. Burstyn, the most orthodox Jew I ever met. He has confidence in my observing for him the rituals ordered by the law[80] as to milk and meat. But he does not eat anything but bread, butter, radishes and pudding day after day.

Oct. 25, 1939

Today, Ursel came home at noon, with a cardboard sign on her chest, fastened around her neck. It read: "This is a bad child. She does not learn Hebrew." Ursel was in tears. I consoled her. When the bus driver came at 2 p.m. to pick her up, I handed him a note thanking Murati[81] for her efforts and informing her that Ursel will not return to school. I'll try to teach her.

Willy is working full time now. It is pitiful to see him come home at 12:30, dead tired, and see him leave at 1:30p.m. He has a long way to walk. Has lost 25 lbs, and is not feeling well. He smokes too

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[77] "Toi, toi, toi" is a German phrase used superstitiously to prevent a confident statement from bringing bad luck upon the speaker. It's equivalent to the English phrase "knock on wood". Presumably the words are just onomatopoeia for knocking three times on wood, or perhaps for spitting three times which is likewise supposed to protect against ill luck. "Toi toi toi" is also used worldwide by opera singers for good wishes prior to a performance.

[78] "Long live Germany!"

[79] "Tomorrow my mother's getting married."

[80] The *Kashrut,* or Jewish dietary laws

[81] Señora Murati, the previously-mentioned Romanian teacher at the Jewish school

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much. Dr. Burstyn, who examined him, warns of anemia by this unreasonable smoking of inferior black cigars. The others are too expensive.

Business in the luncheria is not too good and it is utterly disagreeable to be by myself with Colombian men who are with te amo and te quiero.[82] We wish we had never started it.

Herbert is doing moderately well in the Collegio Americano. Ursel seems to have decided to get out of lessons. I have to hunt for her, doubly difficult, since I can't leave the place without asking someone to stay in it, and I have to have Mrs. Rosenstiel already when I go to the market or to Mr. Spinner's. Yesterday, Ursel was sitting in a tree eating a banana, with a neighborhood boy, while I was yelling for her.[83]

Maxima's successor, a young colored girl, brought a little black puppy of mixed ancestry. The children want to keep her. The little thing has the biggest appetite.

November 10, 1939

Today, the American consul informed us by letter that our application papers for immigration to the U.S.A., of which we had requested transfer months ago in Stuttgart, had arrived, and that we please come to the consulate in the Edificio Odol.

November 11, 1939

So we did. The Consul, an unusually good-looking and cultured man in an immaculate white suit, was sitting at a tremendous desk. - pictures of Jefferson and Washington - very comfortable leather arm chairs - The question: If we still are desirous of going to the U.S.A. We answer with "yes". (Yesterday, Willy had overrun my unwillingness to leave Colombia and my fear of starting all over again, with the remark: "I cannot live very much longer in this climate. And where do you see educational possibilities for the children? To give up this chance would be insanity.") The Consul checked on the data of the papers, joked with Ursel, whom he called pretty, and told us that he will try to get us four numbers of his next quota.

With this in mind, we decided to give up the little house, on account of the business which was more trouble and handicap than profit, and which we could not otherwise get rid or, and Mr. Neuman, who was an extremely unprofitable proposition; and to move into two rooms and kitchen somewhere else.

Dec. 5, 1939

Today, we received a notice to appear before the American consul.

Dec. 6, 1939

Herbert's birthday. We bought a big bar of chocolate and a billfold.

9 a.m. at the American consulate - The Consul has only two quota numbers which, we, nevertheless, take. There will be another two to three months to wait for the other two.

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[82] Both phrases mean "I love you"; the author was often the target of romantic advances by her customers.
[83] While we transcribed this sentence, Ursel (as an adult) said in a surprised voice: "I thought she didn't know about that!" She clearly remembers sitting in that tree with young Joaquin Gonzalez, eating a banana and hiding from her mother in order to avoid her lessons.

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Hundi,[84] the female black dog, is an unmanageable Colombian, with a definite dislike for baths and housebrokenness. We will sell her or give her away when we move; that is: Willy and I - The children don't know yet.[85]

When I came home this night from the Popa, Herbert met me halfway. His little kitten[86] was sick. The boy was all upset and expected me to do the impossible. I fed the little thing a few drops of rum and wrapped it, but it died. Herbert was frantic. I gave him half a bottle of black beer to quieten him and get him to sleep.

Talking of black beer - whenever one of these hot days is gone, the work is done and the customers gone, Willy and I sit down and drink a bottle of black beer. We sit at the big square table in the back of the antesala and something like peace enters our souls. Soon we can lie down and sleep, unless noises hard to define, wake us up and keep us watching.

Dec. 21, 1939

The place is found. It is two rooms, an outdoor kitchen, and a bathroom at the end of an enormous patio. The landlady is a Rumanian Jewess with a daughter of 10. She is in Barranquilla only sporadically. Most of the time she runs a profitable store (of which I have certain suspicions[87]) on the Colombian - Venezuelan frontier. She is of neat appearance and has a boy friend. When she is away, the daughter stays with Rosa, the colored maid, and goes to school. It's a rather odd set-up. The rooms, also without ceilings, are terribly large and only chalked. They make you think of stables. The patio, which has two enormous banana trees, is bordered on one side by the kitchen, the landlady's bedrooms and bathroom, and, at the very end, our bathroom. It looks funny with all these doors. Our scanty furniture looks lost in the large rooms. The air is much tighter downtown and it is hard to breathe. We had to sneak out of the Calle Hospital, avoiding telling anyone our new address.[88] It is close to Christmas, but no Christmas spirit noticeable in this Catholic country. The big day and night is New Year's Eve when nobody goes to bed and - - "Oh, the business you could make."

Our next door neighbors are the Danzigers who originally come from Koblenz. It is a rather messy household. He does all sorts of business. She sews and has a milk and creamery store. They fuss[89] a good deal. Their antesala is piled up with the household goods of relatives, whom they are desperately trying to get out of Germany. They are very hospitable, but not too clean. In the evenings we sometimes sit together on the high sidewalk and talk. Ice cream wagons and tinto wagons come by and we treat ourselves to both. There is not much strenuous conversation, for the day was unbearably hot and the need for relaxation is great.

On other evenings, we sit, the four of us, in the patio. The sky is strange, the moon is floating like a boat, the stars are of a brilliance never seen before. On the flat roof of the distant opposite house a woman walks. She is dressed in black, her hair long over the back. She walks slowly, periodically walks out of our sight and reappears. We don't know her. She is an Indian and looks to me like the

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[84] *Hundi* just means "little dog", in German

[85] Hundi was given to Alberto Cohen when the family moved, a few weeks later. Herbert and Ursel later passed by their old house, and found Hundi there, an unkempt stray with ticks in her ears. They called to her, and she was frantic with joy to see them. The children brought her back to their new home, but she was returned to Alberto Cohen. The children never saw her again.

[86] Named "Mitzi", of course

[87] Cross-border smuggling?

[88] The family snuck out to avoid contact with their eccentric luncheria customers.

[89] Argue with each other

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[illegible] The [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

personification of poised Loneliness. The patio is full of subdued noises, and I tried to catch the atmosphere in a poem.

February 1940

Spinner today offered me a partnership in his place. Very wonderful indeed, since there is no money on my part. I had to tell him that we are not staying very much longer.

Today I got a call from the Prado Hotel, where I had left my address. Mr. R., from Max Factor[90], wants a secretary for a day. I am scared, but I accept and soon am on the way. He is very nice, dictates slowly. Despite this, I have very much trouble understanding his American accent. His long memorandum reflects his amazement about the low standard of this commercial capital of Colombia. After noon, I go home and type it, and, in the evening, I bring it back. It gave me considerable trouble, looking up words in the dictionary, and I am still a little scared that it is not right. I find Mr. R. in a dinner jacket in the beautiful lobby of the Prado Hotel. He pays $4.00, which makes me extremely happy.

Yesterday evening, Ursel wanted to go to the bathroom. It was pitch dark in the back yard and there was no light in Señora's rooms. Neither she, nor the girl, nor Rosa was in the house. I took Ursel by the hand and we walked outside the rod-secured sala on the cement path that led to the bathroom. Ursel stuck her hand, from the outside, through the rods, where the electric switch was, and hell broke loose. Thieves had entered the place miraculously through the front entrance and were escaping now through the same route.
Willy wanted to know what the commotion was, ran out of the front room and bumped into four men. They dropped everything and escaped in the night. All they had gotten and dropped was Señora's cheap jewelry, most of which was lying in front of the house. When she came back, she opened her cedar wardrobe and retrieved $ 250.00 she had hidden. Ursel got a necklace for the successful interruption.

There is no possibility to teach Ursel, and I gave up on this.

March 1940

Today, we were informed by the American Consul that we can pick up the two other visas. It is with mixed emotions that I realize that the Colombian adventure is drawing to a close. Despite all - the heat, sickness, dirt, thieves, primitivity - at least I had come to like this controversial country. I had met friendship and simple human feelings, good to experience in this world gone out of balance.

In the meantime, Pliño del Valle and our even crazier colleague had found out our address and, Sunday afternoon, came to visit. I gave Pliño a red silk monster of a handkerchief that Ede[91] had given to Willy. He was extremely happy.

The Danzigers give Herbert a pair of pants and Ursel a little white skirt and a blue blouse to button on.

We go to the Grace Line agency and arrange for tickets on the *Santa Clara*[92] for the 17th of April to Cuba. Paul Hess, against Alberto Cohen, has convinced us of the advantages of Miami as point of

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[90] The Max Factor cosmetics company, very fashionable at the time, is now a division of Proctor & Gamble.
[91] Ede Sabor, the husband of Willy's older sister Henny.
[92] The *Santa Clara*, a large American-flag transport operated by the Grace Line, entered military service once America joined the war. It was renamed the *Susan B. Anthony*, made numerous crossings of the Atlantic ocean

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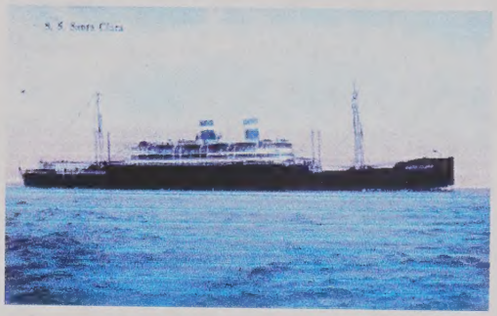
entrance instead of New York. We will have to stay in Havana, Cuba, for some days to wait for the boat to Miami. We also apply for the refund of the Pesos 500.00 deposit, and are informed that we will never be allowed to reside in Colombia after leaving it. Spanish pride! The deposit will be repaid the day of departure and, so, the tickets paid this very day.

April 12, 1940

It is discomforting, this feeling of waiting and spending useless time. The evening before the departure, we give Hummel[93] the electric fan, distribute some more things which we consider unnecessary for the U.S.A.



The day has come. There was no difficulty in retrieving the deposit. The official was very polite and very regretful. There was no trouble, either, in getting the visum for Cuba. We go to the Grace Line Agency and pick up the tickets, this time not first class, but third, on the *Santa Clara.* Zweig pays us a last visit and takes the electric bulbs along.

At 1 p.m. we order a cab and, accompanied by the Danzigers, are driven to the Pier. In the last year Barranquilla has become Port of Colombia. We board the Grace Liner and stand at the railing until the third blowing of the horn. A thousand thoughts cross my mind: this country was our refuge, our haven. It gave us fourteen months filled to the brim with action, impressions, hopes, fears - the complete scale of human emotions. It was an adventure. I am deeply thankful. The Colombian national hymn crosses my mind: "Oh! Gloria Inmarcesible".[94]

ADIOS COLOMBIA.

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carrying supplies and troops, and was finally sunk while transporting troops to Omaha Beach during the Normandy invasion on June 7th 1944.

[93] Name uncertain

[94] "Oh unfading glory!" is the first phrase of the national anthem of Colombia, sometimes used as the song's unofficial name.

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